

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An automatic liquid handling system comprising:

a dispensing tip container having a plurality of holding portions for holding dispensing tips;

5 a dispensing head having attachment portions to which at least one dispensing tip is attached, wherein when one or more dispensing tips are attached to the attachment portions, the dispensing head is capable of performing sucking and expelling operations for sucking liquid in or expelling the liquid out from the one or more dispensing tips;

a moving mechanism that moves the dispensing head;

a sensor that senses if one or more dispensing tips are attached to the attachment portions of the dispensing head when the head moves relative to the sensor, wherein the sensor has a sensing region that extends in a direction slanted with respect to a direction in which the dispensing head moves, and generates an output indicative of a status of the dispensing tips attached to the attachment portions of the dispensing head; and

20 a control device that controls the sucking and expelling operations performed by the dispensing head and controls the moving mechanism to control movements of the dispensing head.

2. The automatic liquid handling system according to claim 1, wherein the sensor optically senses one or more

dispensing tips.

3. The automatic liquid handling system according to claim 2, wherein the sensor comprises a light emitting unit and a light receiving unit disposed apart a predetermined distance from the light emitting unit, a light path being
5 formed between the light emitting unit and the light receiving unit, wherein the moving mechanism moves the dispensing head to traverse the light path.

4. The automatic liquid handling system according to
10 claim 1, further comprising a memory that stores information about a number of dispensing tips to be attached to the attachment portions of the dispensing head with position data indicating the holding portions to which the dispensing tips are to be attached, wherein the control device compares
15 the output of the sensor with the information stored in the memory.

5. The automatic liquid handling system according to claim 4, further comprising adjusting means for adjusting the number of dispensing tips attached to the attachment
20 portions of the dispensing head and the attachment positions of the dispensing tips as indicated by the information stored in the memory when the control device generates a comparison result indicating that the output of the sensor and the information stored in the memory are not in
25 coincidence with each other.

6. The automatic liquid handling system according to claim 4, wherein when the control device generates a comparison result indicating that the output of the sensor and the information stored in the memory are not in coincidence with each other, the control device controls the moving mechanism to stop movement of the dispensing head.

7. The automatic liquid handling system according to claim 6, wherein the control device generates the comparison result each time comparison is performed with respect to one attachment portion of the dispensing head.

8. The automatic liquid handling system according to claim 6, wherein the control device generates the comparison result after comparison is performed with respect to all the attachment portions of the dispensing head.

9. The automatic liquid handling system according to claim 3, wherein the moving mechanism moves the dispensing head in a three dimensional space defined by X-axis, Y-axis, and Z-axis, and swivels the dispensing head in a plane defined by the X-axis and the Y-axis, wherein the light emitting unit and the light receiving unit are disposed in the plane defined by the X-axis and the Y-axis in such a positional relationship that the light path forms 45 degrees with respect to the X-axis and the Y-axis, and the moving mechanism moves the dispensing head in a direction of the X-axis or the Y-axis to traverse the light path.